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(54) Coin-or token-freed game
apparatus

(57) The apparatus has a video screen (2) on a section (9) of which questions are presented to one or two players, who have buttons (5) by which an answer from several possible ones shown on another part (10) of the screen can be selected, a single player having to answer correctly within a time limit, an accumulation of wins in this first mode of play rewarding the player with a second potentially prize-winning mode in which further questions may be posed. This requires the player to answer a number of questions on subjects indicated on a different display (Figure 2) within a time limit, success resulting in a cash prize or a token. The token may be individually marked with a magnetic recording such as a removable coded magnetic strip and may be adapted to receive a plurality of win-recording marks. The apparatus may provide other tests than questions, or at least one mode may be a game of chance.

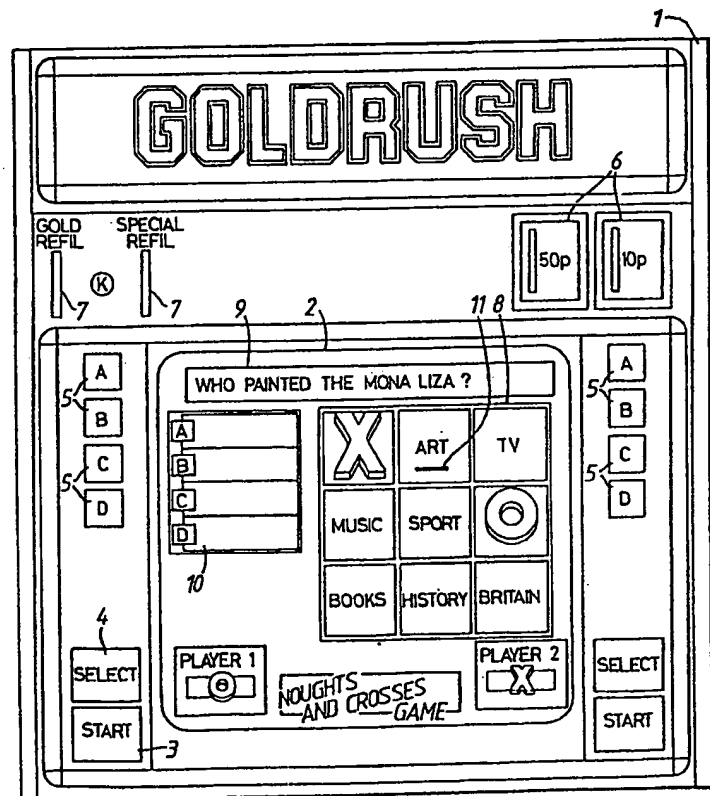


Fig.1.

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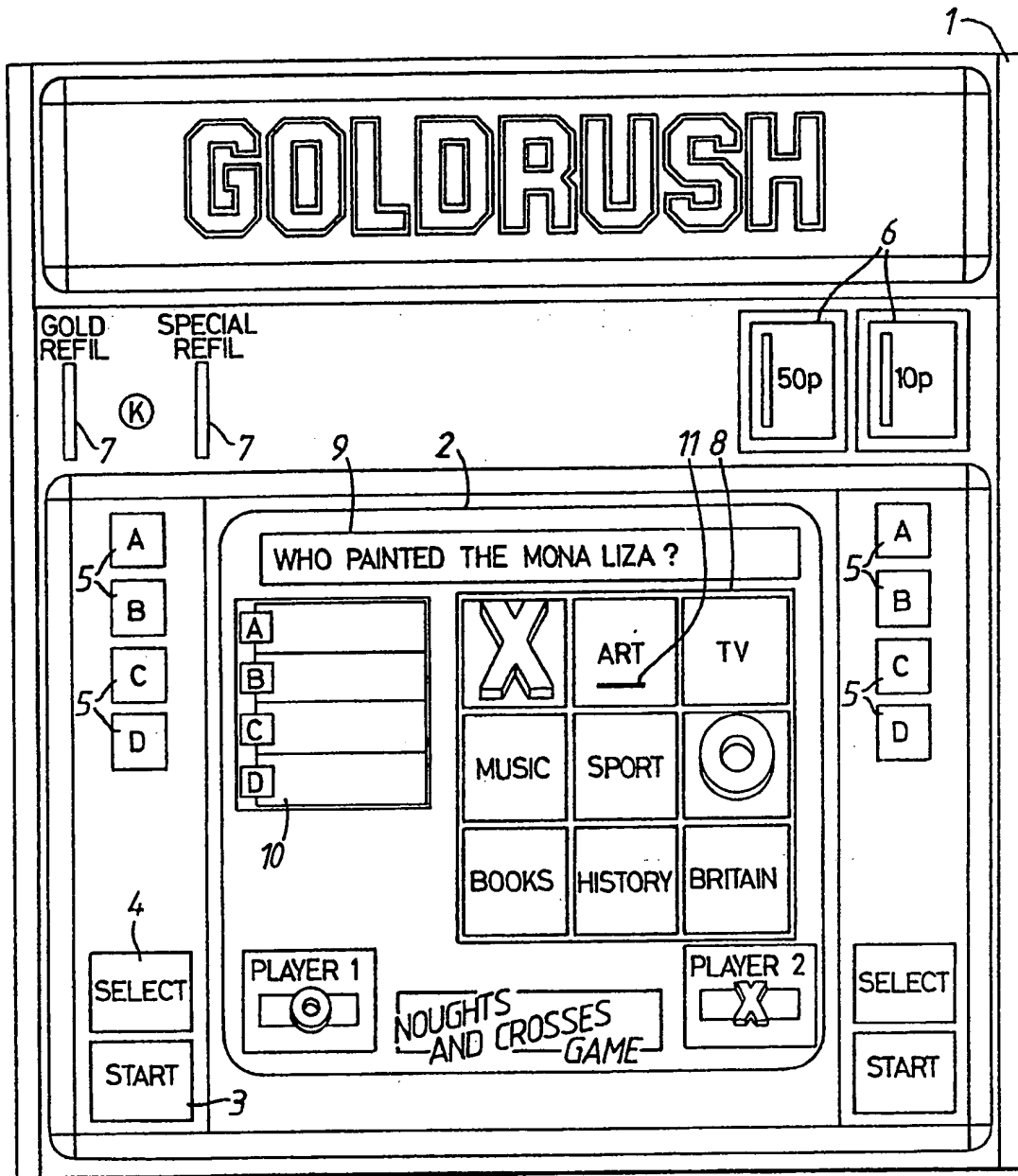


FIG. 1.

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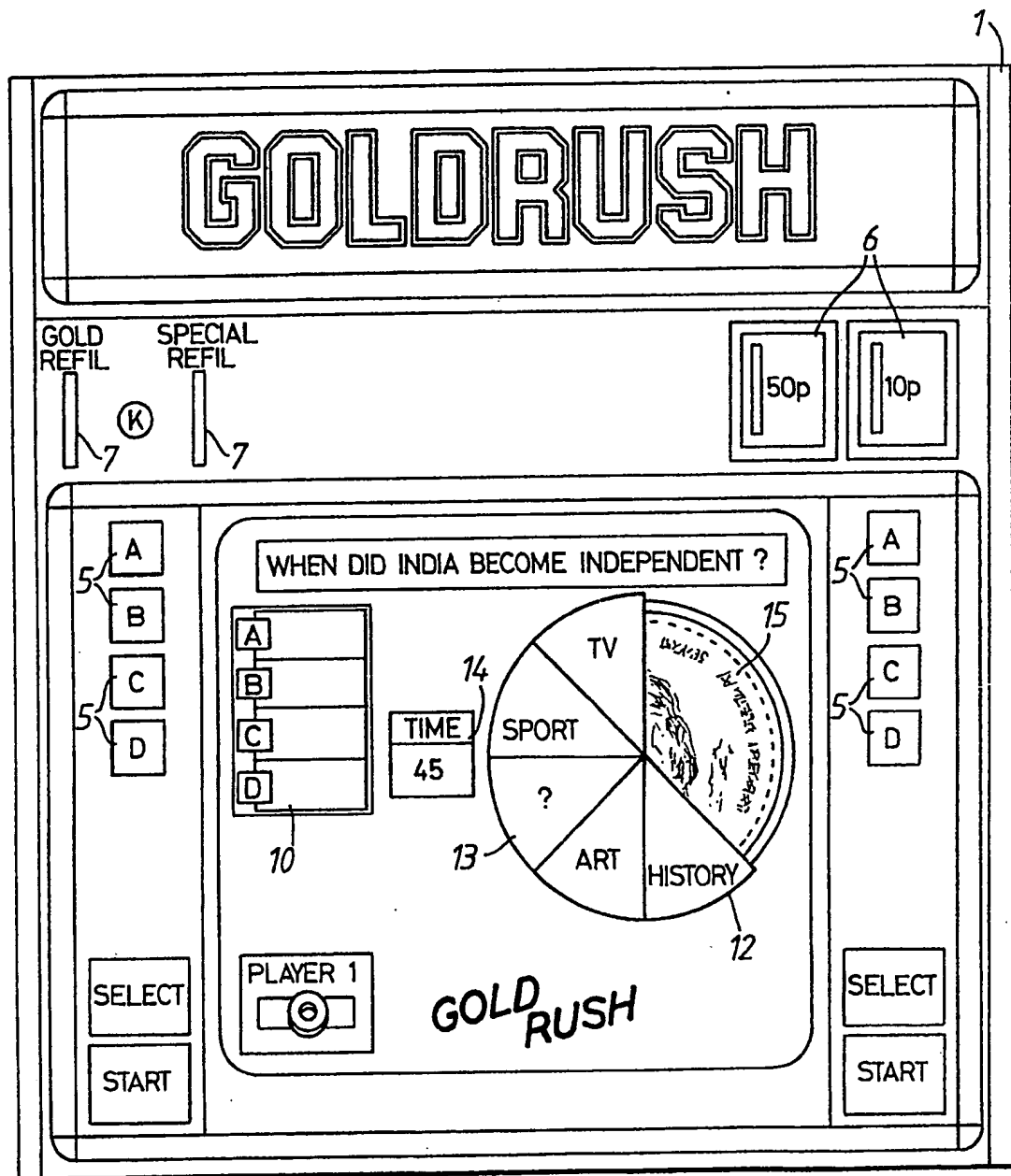


FIG. 2.

SPECIFICATION

Improvements relating to apparatus for games

5 This invention relates to apparatus for games. It is primarily concerned with electronically controlled machines, particularly those which pose problems or ask questions and, if the player is successful, deliver some reward. However, it does also embrace machines where, at least in part, some form of chance or luck determines progress or a win.

One aim is to provide a primary reward which can generate a larger prize and this primary reward may be for personal esteem rather than a monetary or other kind of prize.

According to the present invention there is provided coin or token-free game apparatus in which a player has to survive a qualifying round playing the machine in a first mode to enable play in a second, potentially prize-winning mode.

The enablement of the second mode may be generated by the player winning against the machine or by players playing each other on the machine in the first mode, the second mode being available to the winning player. Provision can be made for selecting single or double player operation.

In a preferred form, at least in one mode a display presents the player or players with questions and there are controls whereby the player or players can indicate the correct answer. A time limit may be imposed on a series or individual questions, expiry of such a limit without a correct answer representing a win for the machine. In the first mode, the player or players may be allowed to select the characteristic of each question from a plurality of available characteristics. Also a player win may be achieved by correct answering of a number of questions less than the total number posed or possible.

With two players, the player first correctly answering the question may be given the opportunity to select the characteristic of the next question.

A win may be rewarded by an individually marked token, the marking conveniently being a coded magnetic recording on a removable strip. How this may be used is described later. Alternatively, the token, initially unmarked, may be freely available to the player. When the player achieves a win, entry of the token into the apparatus causes the apparatus to mark that token individually to record the win. The token will usually be adapted to receive a plurality of win-recording marks. It is the accumulation of these that can generate the prize.

Alternatively, money or redeemable tokens may be paid out at the conclusion of a successful playing of the second mode.

For a better understanding of the invention, one embodiment will now be described, by way of example, with reference to the accompanying drawings, in which:

Figure 1 is a face view of a video machine showing the display for a first stage of a quiz game, and

Figure 2 is a similar face view showing the display during a second stage.

The apparatus is housed in a cabinet 1 with a video screen 2 flanked on each side by players' operating buttons. Each set has a start button 3, a select button 4 and an array of four answer buttons labelled A,B,C and D. There may be more or less than this number, but trials suggest four is best. Above the screen there are slots 6 for coin or token inserts, and prize tokens delivery slots 7.

In addition to the buttons shown, there may be an additional general answer button, one on each side, which the players can press as soon as they think they know the answer to a question posed on the screen 2. The first of these buttons to be pressed will allow the player in question a limited time to identify and press the appropriate button 5. Failure to act will allow the other player a chance.

The game is played in two stages, and can be played by two players in competition with each other or by just one against the machine. The two-player version will be described first.

When dormant, the screen may present the rules of the game. The machine is enabled by insertion of a coin or token in one of the slots 6 and there then appears on the screen a display such as that shown in *Figure 1*. This has a 3-by-3 array 8, each square having a subject or category indicated on it. Above that there is an elongated question window 9, and beside it there is a table 10 itemised A,B,C and D in correspondence with the buttons, for possible answers. There could be two such tables 10 one on each side of a central array 8 if it was thought fairer to have one adjacent each player. The tables would be identical.

This first stage is based on the game Noughts and Crosses, and who starts may be selected at random by the machine, for example by flashing the nought under "Player 1" on the left hand side or the cross under "Player 2" on the right hand side. The chosen player can then press his select button 4 to move a cursor, which is a bright spot or bar 11 on the screen, from one square on the array 8 to the next and so on until it rests on a subject on which he is prepared to answer a question. He then presses his start button 3 and a question on that subject is scrolled into the window 9, while possible answers appear in the tables 10. Each player then selects an answer from the table 10 and the player who presses the correct answer button 5 first has his nought or cross symbol appear in the related square of the array 8, displaying the subject word. Once a player has pressed a button 5, he cannot have another go at that question if he has got the answer wrong. If he does get it wrong and the other player has not attempted it, the latter can have a try, and to help him he may have noticed which button failed to produce the right answer. If he gets it wrong as well, then the game proceeds to the next question. There will then be another random selection to determine who can choose the next subject. However, if a player has given the correct answer, then he is given the choice of the next subject.

The game continues in this way, the object for each player being to complete a line of noughts and crosses, or at least to block the other player

from doing so.

If at the end there is no completed line, one or more tie-break questions will be presented in the window 9, and whoever answers one correctly first will be deemed the winner. He can then go on to the second stage of the game, to be described below.

A single player in the first stage will play the machine in a similar way, but instead of beating an opponent to the correct answer he will have to answer correctly within a time limit. If he does so, then his symbol of a cross will appear in the appropriate square, but if he fails a nought will show, representing a win for the machine. If the player can succeed in making a row of crosses, then he will be able to proceed to the second stage. The time allowed to the single player to answer each question can easily be displayed on the screen or in a separate window (not shown), and the countdown could be made audible as well as visible.

In order to give the players a chance to look at all the possible answers, it may be arranged to have an interval between the scrolling in of the questions and the time when pressing of any of the buttons 5 is effective. For example, five seconds may be allowed to scan the list, and the machine may present a visual and audible countdown to the moment when an answer may be attempted. The general answer buttons referred to above may override this.

Referring now to Figure 2, in the second stage the winner of the first stage has to answer another series of questions presented by a different display on the screen 2. This again has a question window 9 and a table of possible answers 10, but instead of the array 8 there is a circle 12 divided into eight sectors 13, each indicating a subject. Some examples are shown in the Figure, and the question mark represents general knowledge or a random question. There is also a clock window 14 which shows the time available to the player. The select button 4 is redundant for this stage, but as soon as the player presses the start button 3 (he can use either one or one may be rendered active and illuminated) a question appears in the window 9 related to the subject on the first sector 12. If he answers this correctly, then this sector disappears to reveal part of a gold medal 15 below.

A question on the subject of the second sector is then presented and the player answers accordingly, and so on around the circle 12 with the aim of revealing completely the gold medal 15.

The progression need not be clockwise or in strict sequence, or remaining sectors might be swapped around so that the player would be uncertain as to which subject he would be questioned on next. Alternatively there might be provision for the player to choose the order of subjects so that he could deal with those he felt confident about first, leaving as much time as possible for the difficult subjects.

Should he fail to answer a question correctly, then the associated sector will remain. However, there will be twelve questions (or at least more then eight) available for this stage, and if the

player has gone once round the circle 12 and time is still available, the machine will return to the subject of any remaining sector and ask another question on it. Thus, second or even third time around the player may succeed in removing all the sectors and reveal the full gold medal.

As a result of this success, the machine will issue from the left hand delivery slot 7 a "gold" token with a coded magnetic tape on it, the code representing a unique individual number.

The player can keep this token, while the magnetic tape can be removed and stuck to a personal claim form or card available from the promotor. For example, with the machine installed in a club, a supply of such cards would be available from the bar.

The next object for the player is to win more tokens and complete his card with magnetic tape strips. Having done this, he can post it to the promotor, where the wins can be checked by reading of the individual tape strips, each unique, and checking against a central record. It would thus be impossible for someone having won just one game to duplicate the single magnetic strip as many times as necessary to complete a card and then send it off hoping for a win.

In an alternative system, players may have issued to them a card resembling a credit card. When the player has won, insertion of this card into a slot in the machine will cause the machine to mark that card accordingly. When the card has attained the requisite number of marks it can be returned to the promotor.

It is envisaged that not every card so returned will necessarily generate a prize. Instead, they may go in batches into a lottery, from which one or a limited number of prize winners will be drawn.

There are two delivery slots 7, and the second one may be for only occasional special use. It is proposed that, on a random basis, or perhaps when a harder set of questions than usual are set, or when the player is set a stiffer time limit than normal, a win will cause a token to issue from this second slot. For example, it may be referred to as the "platinum" token. It too will have a magnetic strip which can be peeled off and attached to a claim card, but that strip will be coded to represent a multiple of the value of the "ordinary" magnetic strips. For example, one platinum token may be worth ten gold.

In a further variation the prize may be cash or tokens redeemable on the premises for cash. This allows considerable variation in awards; for example the cash prizes may be the range 50p, £1, £2, £5, £10, £25, the amount paid out being related to the difficulty of the questions or the time allowed, or being a matter of chance. Even if the gold medal or other underlying symbol was not fully revealed, minor prizes for near success might be awarded, especially for a series of difficult questions or an abbreviated answering period.

What the player stands to win may be displayed and this could alter stage-by-stage.

The machine will preferably have disc drive, which will enable a vast store of questions to be

available with rapid access. For example, a three inch disc drive would easily be able to handle five thousand questions and a corresponding library of possible answers. When a question has been asked, it will be "flagged" or noted in some way so that it cannot be repeated within a brief period. For example, all other questions on that subject may have to be asked first before the machine can return to the original one. However, the same set of questions, however large, cannot be kept indefinitely, and there will be periodic replacements of the disc, with fresh sets of questions.

As a security measure, it is proposed that each disc should have a companion module which would have to be installed with that disc. It could take the form of a plug in chip, for example, whose function is to 'unscramble' the information from the disc, which would be so coded as to be otherwise unintelligible.

Rather than questions and answers, the machine could be adapted to test some other skill of the player or players, and this might involve a different type of control from the answer buttons. For example, there might be a test of manual dexterity, the control being a joystick and the screen showing an image which has to be moved past obstacles by operation of that joystick.

Alternatively, one mode at least might be a gambling feature. If that is the first mode, for example, the player with luck would move on to the second mode, which could still be the question and answer feature, or a skill test.

CLAIMS

1. Coin or token-freed game apparatus in which a player has to survive a qualifying round playing the machine in a first mode to enable play in a second, potentially prize winning mode.
2. Apparatus as claimed in claim 1, wherein the enablement of the second mode is generated by the player winning against the machine.
3. Apparatus as claimed in claim 1, wherein the enablement of the second mode is generated by players playing each other on the machine in the first mode, the second mode being available to the winning player.
4. Apparatus as claimed in claims 2 and 3, wherein provision is made for selecting single or double player operation.
5. Apparatus as claimed in any preceding claim, wherein at least in one mode a display presents the player or players with questions and there are controls whereby the player or players can indicate the correct answer.
6. Apparatus as claimed in claim 5, wherein a time limit is imposed on a series or individual questions, expiry of such a limit without a correct answer representing a win for the machine.
7. Apparatus as claimed in claim 5 or 6, wherein, in said first mode, the player or players can select the characteristic of each question from a plurality of available characteristics.
8. Apparatus as claimed in claim 5, 6, or 7,

swering of a number of questions less than the total number posed or posable.

9. Apparatus as claimed in claim 6, 7, or 8, as appendant to claim 3, wherein the player answering the question correctly first scores that towards a possible win.

10. Apparatus as claimed in claim 9, as appendant to claim 7, wherein the player first correctly answering the question is given the opportunity to select the characteristic of the next question.

11. Apparatus as claimed in any preceding claim, wherein a win is rewarded by an individually marked token.

12. Apparatus as claimed in claim 11, wherein the marking is a magnetic recording.

13. Apparatus as claimed in claim 12, wherein the token has a removable coded magnetic strip.

14. Apparatus as claimed in claim 11, wherein the token, initially unmarked, is freely available to the player, and wherein when the player achieves a win, entry of the token into the apparatus causes the apparatus to mark that token individually to record the win.

15. Apparatus as claimed in claim 14, wherein the token is adapted to receive a plurality of win recording marks.

16. Game apparatus substantially as hereinbefore described with reference to the accompanying drawings.